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ABSTRACT

Hermods, the largest correspondence school in Sweden, was established in 1898 and has offered university-level courses since 1953. In 1973, a policy was implemented allowing any university department in Sweden to offer one or more of its courses as distance courses. At present, three forms of university-level distance education are available in Sweden: single-subject courses arranged by single institutions, multimedia courses, and study programs for nursing staff. During the 1985-1986 academic year, 385 single-subject courses were available. Almost half of these were in the social sciences, including education and psychology, and about a third were in the fields of science and technology. The establishment of the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (SEBC) in 1977 was accompanied by a number of radical reforms in the sphere of university education, including changes in the total number of universities and colleges and in admission criteria. A formal program of cooperation between SEBC and Hermods began in 1979, and Sweden's first fully integrated multimedia course officially began in September 1981. Multimedia courses are continually being developed. Self-instructional distance training for nurses (including teleconferencing, expert demonstrations, and study centers) has been available since 1981. (An appendix to this paper includes examples of multiple-choice items used in the multimedia course.) (MN)

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VARIOUS DESIGNS OF DISTANCE TEACHING AT SWEDISH UNIVERSITIES

Paper presented at the ICDE 13th World Conference,
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Various Designs of Distance Teaching at Swedish Universities

There is a long history of distance education in Sweden. What is now the largest correspondence school in Sweden, Hermods, was established as long ago as 1898. Even today, Hermods continues to offer distance education courses. For many years, Hermods offered courses at primary and secondary school level, but from 1953 its activities were expanded so as to include courses at university level. A system of cooperation was established between Hermods and Lund University offering independent single-subject courses in a large number of subjects over many years. Academic qualifications awarded by Hermods counted towards Swedish university degrees. At present, Hermods offers four university courses (two in English and one each in French and Economics). These are available to Swedes living abroad.

Already at the beginning of the 1970´s, the idea had been proposed of establishing in Sweden a system of distance education at university level, based on the model of the British Open University. The Swedish Government set up a commission - the TRU Commission - to study the application of radio and TV in the field of Swedish education. One of the duties of this commission was to study the possibility of establishing a Swedish Open University. On the basis of the research carried out by the commission, it was decided that a centralised Swedish Open University should not be established. Several reasons were given against such a centralised model , but the most telling one was a general concern about quality. It was considered essential that distance education courses were of the same quality as the regular courses offered at the universities. A guarantee for this could be provided if distance education was put into the hands of institutions which were also engaged in research. In 1973, the universities´ own distance education system was established, which means that any university department in Sweden can offer one or more of its courses as distance courses.

Another outcome of the work of the TRU-Commission was the establishment in 1977 of the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (SEBC), for the production of educational programmes for radio and TV. Distance education at university level was to be one of the responsibilities of the new company.

At the end of the 1970´s there was in Sweden a shortage of nurses with specialist qualifications and also of nursing school teachers. With the experiences of the single-subject courses at a distance came the idea of arranging the training of nurses as distance education.

Against this background we can distinguish three different designs of distance education at university level in Sweden at present: single-subject courses arranged by single institutions, multi-media courses, and study programmes for nursing staff.

1. Single-subject courses arranged by single institutions

Since 1973 when the first 8 single-subject courses started, hundreds of single-subject courses have been offered by all universities in Sweden and in a wide variety of subjects. During the academic year 1985/86 there are 385 single-subject courses on offer. Most of them are basic level courses, but there are some at advanced undergraduate level. So far, no postgraduate courses have been offered. The variety of subjects is great but almost 50 per cent of the courses are in the field of social science, including education and psychology; about one third are in the fields of science and technology.

Students taking distance courses are from all parts of the country, but most of the students in each particular course live in the region where the university that offers the course is situated. There are no restrictions of admission with regard to domicile, which means that you can be admitted to a distance course even if you live in the very city where the university is situated.

As regards the methodology of distance education, no general recommendations have been given by the national or regional authorities. Consequently a diversity of methods have been adopted by the different institutions. In 1973 when it all started, hardly any institutions had any experience of a pedagogical preparation of distance education material. Neither has any evaluation of how these courses have met the methodological standards of distance education been undertaken in the 12 years since. Therefore, we can give no systematic description of the methods used, but from discussions with colleagues from different universities we have sifted out a few characteristics. Normally the students have done their work (studied) at home, sometimes guided by preproduced material. In all cases there are contact sessions on the university campus, varying in number. In some courses, these contact sessions have formed the basis of the instruction. Two-way communication takes place by post or telephone or both. Sometimes no two-way communication has been provided for.

Even if this gives a confusing impression of the single-subject courses offered as distance education, it is a real alternative for the students. The number of courses as well as the number of students rise each year. From course evaluations we know that students welcome the opportunity to study at a distance, and that their attitudes are positive. This confusing picture, however, has created a demand among teachers responsible for distance education for training in how to develop a self-instructional material. One programme of such training has just started at the University of Lund.

2. Multi-media courses

When the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (SEBC) started in 1977, one of its responsibilities was to offer education at university level. The same year in which the SEBC was formed a number of radical reforms were introduced in the sphere of university education. At the same time as the number of universities

and colleges was increased from 6 to 24, the rules for admission were also changed. These changes meant that adults over the age of 25 who had been in gainful employment for at least 4 years could study at college or university. this reform, both by making a larger number of places available and by changing the rules of admission, gave a new impetus to the idea of increased distance education. It could thus serve as a complement to the decentralised university system.

Against this background, it was proposed in 1979 that SEBC, Hermods and a university institution should co-operate, and thus bring about a rejuvenation of distance education in Sweden, at university level. Such co-operation would have the desirable effect of meeting the demand for quality, as university teachers would be responsible for the factual content. Furthermore, an institution with experience of compiling distance education material would be responsible for the pedagogical presentation and for checking the printed matter and postal assignments. And one of the participants had the experience of how sound and vision could become integrated parts of the whole. Conditions seemed right for a multi-media package.

We are going to describe the working process of the very first multi-media course. Subsequent courses have been developed after the same pattern.

The choice of subject for the first course proved to be rather difficult. There were many subjects to choose from, but we established several criteria which we felt must be fulfilled. Firstly, we must choose a course which was already established at some university. The reasoning behind this was the demand for quality. If we built up new courses, they could easily be regarded as not meeting the full standards of university courses. Another requirement was that the course must, in normal circumstances, be oversubscribed; that is to say that applicant students were normally turned down because of an insufficient number of places. A third condition was that the content of the course should have a broad general interest, which is to say that people ought to be able to take advantage of the whole or of parts of the course without having to consider sitting examinations (in order to gain points).

By applying these criteria the choice was much easier and we eventually decided upon a course in Labour Law at the ten point level. This course fulfilled all the criteria: it was already established at a university, it was oversubscribed and there was a broad public interest in Sweden as new laws in the field of labour legislation had recently come into force. the number of points is equivalent to a half-term of full-time studies.

To construct the course a project group was appointed consisting of three lecturers from the Department of Commercial Law at Lund University, responsible for the factual content; two lecturers from the Department of Education, also in Lund, responsible for the pedagogical presentation; a project leader from SEBC and Hermods, with responsibility for the printed material. The group began its preparatory work in March 1980 and the course officially began in September 1981 with an introductory TV program.

There were virtually no prerequisites set for the project group. Such limitations as there were, consisted of a predetermined list of contents and set course literature, but the pedagogical presentation was left completely free. In general, the group was free to arrange the course with regard to both the printed material and radio/TV in accordance with the educational model we considered to be the best.

After having analysed the course´s content, it was built up around 32 units or lessons. Each of these lessons could be illustrated by either a radio or a TV program. These 32 lessons were then moulded together into 9 blocks, comprising logical units.

So far as the printed matter was concerned, we decided to avail ourselves of the set university course literature, and to produce a study guide for each of the nine blocks. These study guides would serve as teaching aids in the students´ structuring of the content of the course literature, whilst at the same time providing complementary information. The aim was quite simply to replace conventional lessons, to a certain degree.

Each of the nine study guides also contained a set of postal assignments. As we expected the total number of students would be large, we wished to make use of the services of Hermods´ advanced computerised correction system, CADE (Computer Assisted Distance Education). This implied that we had to use multiple-choice questions but as the subject matter was quite sophisticated we had to develop some more advanced types of items (see Appendix). Besides that, the CADE system had to be changed so that the students received comments on all their answers, correct as well as incorrect ones. By also providing the student with comments on his/her correct answers we felt that we would be supplying a pedagogically desirable feedback, from which the student would benefit. The system has been adapted further so as to integrate the introductory and concluding comments in view of the course´s content and level.

The group had completely free hands so far as the radio and TV programmes were concerned, both as regards the number of programmes and their content. A decisive factor was, of course, the way in which sound and vision, as seen from the pedagogical standpoint, should be integrated. In view of the character and content of the subject we found it advantageous to produce more sound than visual programmes. The result was 8 TV programmes and 24 radio programmes.

Once the students have completed the whole course, they will have the possibility of taking an examination for academic credit at the university. The examination can be sat at different places all over the country. One condition for taking the examination is that the students must have sent in answers to all the postal assignments in the course. Students who pass the exam, and who also university admission requirements, then receive a certificate issued by the university.

This totally integrated course has been evaluated (cp Flinck - Wångdahl Flinck, 1983). At the time of evaluation, 4,000 students had registered for the course. The following are some of the main

results of the evaluation:

- one third of the students represent new student groups within the concept of a more equitable admissions system for university education (on campus the share is about 10 per cent);

- the students meant that the study guides facilitated the study of the regular textbooks;

- the students meant that the assignments for submission covered the content of the course but were hard to work with;

- the students meant that the computerized comments are instructive and stimulating;

- the TV programmes were watched by more than 85 per cent of the students and were considered well integrated and stimulating;

- the radio programmes were instructive and topical;

- examination performance was up to on-campus standard.

The first multi-media course has led to a continuous production of new multi-media courses, one in Chemistry, one in Astronomy and one in Computer Technology. We might mention that the course in Computer Technology, running this year, has about 40,000 students enrolled.

3. Study programmes for nursing staff

As we have mentioned above there was in the 1970´s a shortage of nurses with specialist qualifications and also of nursing school teachers. To remedy the situation the possibility of using distance education was discussed. To size up the interest of presumptive students some pilot studies were carried out. Regular training for these professions takes place on campus at certain colleges in Sweden, and the courses were not oversubscribed. The results of the pilot studies indicated that many students were interested in the training programme as such, but for social reasons they were not willing to move to the training colleges and stay there for a training period of one to one and a half years. The social reasons had to do with family conditions, such as child care, and financial conditions. When presumptive students were asked if they would take the training by distance education, 75 per cent answered yes.

This was the background for discussion on how to arrange a complete study programme, where lots of practical training was incuded, as distance education. Compared to the single-subject courses, this enterprise was different in two ways. First of all, these were complete study programmes, which means that when the students had finished the programme they were fully qualified practitioners of their profession. Secondly, the programme included lots of practical training. One of the study programmes was a teachers´ training programme, which means that the practical training included classroom teaching. The other study programme was a training of district nurses for the public health

service. The decision was taken in 1981 to design the programmes in the following way.

The basis of the programmes should be preproduced self-instructional study guides serving as teaching aids in the students´ structuring of the content of the course literature. As practical training requiring supervision was also included in the courses, a number of study centres with supervisors were established close to the homes of the students. Thirdly, as some part courses required the participation of experts and specialists and the performance of demonstrations, contact lessons for all students were included. These contact lessons were arranged on campus during shorter periods, two or three times a semester. Later on, in one of the established courses, teleconferencing was also introduced.

At the study centres the students took part in practical training, had access to supplementary material and library etc, and could also meet with other students taking the same course. The supervisor was appointed on a part-time basis and was to a certain extent also responsible for a minor share of the examination. In one of the courses - for nursing school teachers - the study centres were connected with nursing schools; in the others - courses for nurses towards specialist qualifications - the study centres were connected with hospitals.

Two of those courses have been evaluated (Flinck, 1984, and Flinck-Jönsson, 1984). The number of students was very small; a total of 93 students were included in the evaluation. These are some of the main results of this evaluation.

- all of the students found distance education a very good alternative;

- the students meant that the study guides facilitated the study work;

- the practical training was felt to be very well integrated in the programme;

- the students found the work at the study centres supporting;

- they also had a positive attitude to the mixing of self-study, study centre work, practical training and contact sessions.

The programmes described above continue and new students are enrolled. One new programme - for sick children´s nurses - has already started, and two more are just now under production - one for assistants in Diagnostic Radiology and one for nurses in Psychiatry.

What we have described here is what is going on at present and where we are involved. What comes next we do not know exactly, but using the computer as a two-way communicator on line is an exciting area.

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Appendix

Examples of multiple-choice items used in the multi-media course.

Item 1

The "December Compromise" is seen as a mile-stone in the relations between the parties on the labour market. Which of the following statements is best in accordance with the meaning of the "December Compromise"?

The December Compromise meant

A. that the employers accepted to enter into a collective labour contract in exchange for the employees keeping the peace during the period of contract.

B. that the trade unions accepted the right of employers to lead and assign work and freely to discharge and hire employees in exchange for a collective labour contract.

C. that the employers accepted the right of employees to found trade unions and that the labour unions accepted the right of employers to lead and assign work and freely to discharge and hire employees.

D. that the organizations of the labour market should strive to solve labour conflicts by cooperation and collective bargaining.

E. that is was declared illegal to discharge anyone owing to membership of a trade union or trade union activities.

Item 2

Which of the following statements are correct?

1. Jurisprudential literature is often called precedent.

2. The so-called Saltsjöbaden Agreement was concluded between the SAF and the LO in 1938.

3. A labour contract from a legal point of view is always a contract of employment.

4. The Labour Court was established in 1936.

5. The so-called Saltsjöbaden Spirit meant that the parties of the labour market should be allowed to mind their business without any interference from the State in the form of legislation or otherwise.

6. The SAF was established in 1906.

7. There is an agreement between the SAF and the LO as to the establishment of industrial councils.

8. The motivation for the judgement from the Labour Court is called proposition.

9. The LO was founded in 1898.

10. Scarcity of work by laws is always a valid reason for discharge.

A. 1, 3, 5, 7 and 8
B. 2, 5, 7, 9 and 10
C. 1, 2, 4, 8 and 10
D. 1, 2, 5, 8 and 9
E. 1, 4, 6, 7 and 9